Arizona Treefrog

Scientific Name: *Hyla wrightorum*. Species name honors Albert and Anna Wright, authors of "Handbook of Frogs and Toads of the United States and Canada" (1933).

Description: One of several treefrog species found in Arizona, the Arizona treefrog is a bright green to coppery-brown frog with a dark stripe running along each side from nose to groin. The stripe extends beyond the frog's shoulder but often breaks up into blotches toward the rear. The similar-looking Pacific treefrog (*Pseudacris regilla*) has dark stripes that end at the shoulder. In addition to side stripes, the Arizona treefrog also may have dark blotches on its head, back and rear legs. The belly is white or cream-colored.

Like many treefrogs, the Arizona treefrog has toe pads, mildly webbed hind feet and smooth skin. It grows up to about 2.25 inches long. Males average a slightly smaller size than females, and have a dusky green to tan throat.

The Arizona treefrog tadpole grows to about 1.5 inches. It is golden brown with dark mottling on the tail. When viewed from above, its eyes are set far apart at the edges of its head.

Distribution: The Arizona treefrog's range spans from near Williams, Ariz., southeast along the Mogollon Rim and into the mountains of western New Mexico. Treefrog populations also are found in the Sierra Ancha Mountains of central Arizona, the Huachuca Mountains and Canelo Hills of southeastern Arizona, and the Sierra Madre Occidental of northern Mexico.

Habitat: Arizona treefrogs live near streams, ponds, cienegas and wet meadows in oak, pine and fir forests. Frogs can be found in shallow pools, on damp ground in meadows, or in trees and shrubs along slow-moving streams. Arizona treefrogs mostly are found above 5,000 feet in elevation.

Biology: Arizona treefrogs exhibit the "classic" frog life cycle — eggs and tadpoles are aquatic, while adult frogs are semi-aquatic or terrestrial.

Adult Arizona treefrogs breed in late June to August, during and after the monsoon rains. Male Arizona treefrogs typically call in choruses for several nights after heavy rainfall. The call is a series of short, low-pitched metallic "clacks" repeated one to three times per minute. Pairs mate in water, often using shallow rain-filled pools. These pools usually do not contain water year-round, and thus support fewer aquatic predators. Females lay eggs in a mass attached to aquatic vegetation. The eggs hatch into tadpoles, and the tadpoles metamorphose into frogs in six to 11 weeks.

Adult Arizona treefrogs eat insects, earthworms and other invertebrates. In contrast, tadpoles primarily feed on plant matter like algae, aquatic vegetation and debris. Predators of tadpoles and adult frogs include dragonfly larvae and giant water bugs, gartersnakes, wading birds and small mammals (such as raccoons).

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Status: Arizona schoolchildren selected the Arizona treefrog as the state amphibian, and the Arizona Legislature ratified their choice in 1986. Populations appear to be stable.

Management Needs: Many of Arizona's native amphibians face threats from nonnative predators and competitors, human-caused habitat modification, drought and disease. Protecting and maintaining high-quality habitat is essential for the continued existence of native amphibians. This includes the removal of nonnative predators such as American bullfrogs, crayfish and nonnative fishes.

In addition, a fungal disease called chytridiomycosis affects many of our native amphibians, including Arizona treefrogs. Biologists believe this disease may be causing amphibians to decline worldwide. More research is needed to determine how to conserve amphibians in the face of this disease.

▪ As a biologist in the Amphibians and Reptiles Program, Suzanne Goforth often can be found capturing frogs and getting muddy in creeks along the Mogollon Rim.

Illustration by Zackery Zdinak